

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6983

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 1317Z

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR ET US

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH FONMIN: ERITREA: USG'S
HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

1. I TOOK OPPORTUNITY MY NOV. 7 MEETING WITH MOD AND FONMIN TO RAISE USG'S SUBJECT CONCERNS. I POINTED OUT THAT US ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION REFLECTS USG'S WELL-KNOWN VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUE PROCESS IN WAYS WHICH DO NOT PERMIT US TO SUBMERGE THEM. I THOUGHT IT TIMELY TO RESTATE THESE CONCERNS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM. USG THUS HOPED THAT EPMG WOULD SEE ITS WAY CLEAR TO PERMIT ICRC AND VOLAGS ACCESS TO ERITREA AND ALLOW VOLAGS TO RESUME THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AND OTHER RELIEF COMMODITIES. I SAID THAT USG BELIEVES THAT MANY INNOCENT CIVILIANS ARE GETTING HURT IN MILITARY OPERATIONS AND THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONDUCT OF ETHIOPIAN TROOPS.

2. FONMIN EXPRESSED UNDERSTANDING FOR REASONS WHICH MOTIVATED ME TO MAKE THESE REPRESENTATIONS. HE SAID EPMG DESIRED TO COOPERATE WITH THE ICRC AND THE VOLAGS. HE ASSERTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN "PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES
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IN ARRANGING COOPERATION ON THE GROUND". HE SAID THAT

ICRC REPS WHO HAD COME TO ETHIOPIA HAD FAILED TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS FACING THE EPMG. THE EPMG HAD WANTED THE ICRC TO CHANNEL ITS AID THROUGH THE ETHIOPIAN RED CROSS (ERC). IT WAS TRUE, FONMIN CONTINUED THAT ERC WAS ORGANIZATIONALLY UNABLE TO HANDLE THE TASK AT THAT TIME BUT ICRC COULD HAVE HELPED THE ERC TO IMPROVE ITS CAPABILITIES. EPMG DID NOT EXCLUDE ICRC PRESENCE IN ERITREA BUT CONTINUED TO DESIRE THAT LATTER WORK THROUGH ERC. ICRC HAD SHOWN LACK OF INTEREST IN SO PROCEEDING, FONMIN SAID. HE HOPED THAT THE QUESTION COULD BE APPROACHED "ON THE LEVEL OF PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS ON THE GROUND."

3. IT IS PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, FONMIN THEN SAID, THAT CIVILIANS SUFFER IN CONFLICTS OF TYPE NOW IN COURSE IN ERITREA. THIS IS REGRETTABLE. FONMIN QUITE UNDERSTOOD THAT CIVILIAN LOSS OF LIFE "CANNOT BE CONDONED." HOWEVER, ERITREAN INSURGENTS ARE CONDUCTING MILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH DELIBERATELY INVOLVED AND ENDANGER CIVILIANS, FONMIN SAID. THIS, HE NOTED, IS NOT UNDERSTOOD ABROAD. INSURGENTS FEEL THAT WHEN ETHIOPIAN SECURITY FORCES REACT AND CIVILIANS SUFFER, THEY (INSURGENTS) WILL BENEFIT POLITICALLY. ACCORDINGLY, INSURGENTS HAVE ADOPTED TACTIC OF SYSTEMATICALLY EXPOSING CIVILIANS. FONMIN HOPED THAT WHEN WE ASSESSED PROBLEM WE WOULD TAKE THESE ERITREAN INSURGENT TACTICS INTO ACCOUNT. FONMIN OBSERVED THAT ERITREANS WERE ABLE PROPAGANDISTS. THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN AROUSING PUBLIC SYMPATHY. THEY WELL KNOW HOW EFFECTIVE THIS SYMPATHY HAD BEEN IN NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, " PARTICULARLY IN THE WEST." THEY HAD, FOR EXAMPLE, TRIED HARD IN LAST FEW MONTHS TO CONVEY IMPRESSION THAT EPMG DELIVERATELY STARVING PEOPLE IN ERITREA AS PUNITIVE MEASURE. THIS WAS UNTRUE. TRUTH IS THAT ERITREAN INSURGENTS HAVE BEEN INTERFERING WITH DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF BY ATTACKING DEPOTS AND CONVOYS AND USING CAPTURED FOOD SUPPLIES FOR MILITARY PURPOSES. INDEED, THEY HAD MADE RELIEF GOODS INTO A TARGET. THEY TRIED TO SEIZE RELIEF COMMODITIES AND THEN BLAMED EPMG FOR DENYING RELIEF TO THE PEOPLE.

4. MOD THEN SPOKE IN SUPPORT OF FONMIN'S DESCRIPTION OF SITUATION. HE SAID EPMG HAD BEEN COMPELLED TO STOP FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN SOME AREAS OF ERITREA BECAUSE OF INSURGENT

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ATTACKS ON ETHIOPIAN CONVOYS. HE SAID THAT IN REMOTE ERITREAN AREAS, NOTABLY AROUND NACFA AND AFABET, INSURGENTS WERE EVEN TRYING TO INTERFERE WITH HARVESTING PROCESS. HE NOTED THAT EPMG MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO INDOCTRINATE TROOPS TO REQUIREMENTS OF UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN WHICH IT IMPERATIVE TO SEPARATE TO DEGREE POSSIBLE "SECESSIONISTS" FROM INNOCENT CIVILIANS.

5. IN TAKING NOTE OF FOREGOING I SAID THAT WE WERE NOT IMPLYING THAT EXCESSES WERE ONE-SIDED. HOWEVER, WE HAVE RELATIONS WITH EPMG, NOT WITH INSURGENTS, AND I THEREFORE FELT COMPELLED TO DISCUSS OUR PRE-OCCUPATIONS WITH IT. I FELT THAT INDOCTRINATION OF SOLDIERS TO WHICH MOD HAD REFERRED SOMETHING LESS THAN SUCCESSFUL AND THAT MORE SHOULD BE DONE TO PROTECT INNOCENT CIVILIAN BYSTANDERS. HUMMEL

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